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## LACUNAE .....

### Beware! Exploding trousers

The peculiar case of Richard Buckley's exploding trousers was among the subjects that inspired the 2005 Ig Nobel prize winners. The "Igs" are awarded for science that "first makes you laugh, then makes you think," and "cannot and should not be reproduced." A New Zealander was awarded the Agricultural History Award for describing the health hazards of sodium chlorate, which, in 1931, caused an outbreak of exploding trousers among farmers in rural New Zealand (*Agricultural History* 2004;78:346–60). Mr Buckley, who wasn't wearing his trousers when they exploded, witnessed a string of detonations in his pants after he had hung them to dry in front of a fire. Other men were unfortunately occupying their trousers at the time of immolation. The mystery of the exploding breeches was solved when it was learned that the farmers used sodium chlorate, which becomes violently explosive when combined with organic fibres, such as cotton or wool, as a herbicide to kill ragwort weed. (Excerpt from Jeanne Lenzer, Mr Buckley's exploding trousers and other scientific observations. *BMJ* 2005;**331**:865. Contributed by Ian Scott)